

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SAM-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 AID-05 /075 W

----- 070479

R 030704Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6496

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 5897

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, AS

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER ON PORTUGUESE TIMOR

1. PRIME MINISTER (ALSO ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER) HAS CLEARLY BEEN PERSONALLY DIRECTING AUSTRALIAN POLICY ON PORTUGUESE TIMOR AND HAS COME UNDER CRITICISM ESSENTIALLY ON TWO COUNTS. THE OPPOSITION HAS TWITTED HIM FOR NOT PLAYING A MORE POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE, WHILE LEFT WING MEMBERS OF LABOR PARTY CAUCUS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD PLAY MORE ACTIVE HUMANITARIAN ROLE ON ISLAND ITSELF. WHITLAM AND DEFENSE MINISTER MORRISON SPENT SEVERAL HOURS MORNING SEPTEMBER 1 CONFERRING WITH PORTUGUESE ENVOY DR. ALMEIDA SANTOS WHO THEREAFTER PROCEEDED SEPTEMBER 2 TO ATAURO. OPERATIVE PARAGRAPH OF BRIEF COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AFTER MEETING WITH SANTOS FOLLOWS: "IN THE COURSE OF DISCUSSIONS WITH THE ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE THE QUESTION AROSE OF AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN A POSSIBLE MULTINATIONAL SUPERVISORY BODY IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR. THE AUSTRALIAN MINISTERS SAID THAT THEY WERE NOT IN A POSITION TO INDICATE A DEFINITIVE VIEW ON THIS QUESTION IN ADVANCE OF THE OUTCOME OF THE TALKS WHICH DR SANTOS WILL BE HAVING IN TIMOR AND THE FURTHER TALKS BETWEEN INDONESIA AND PORTUGAL IN JAKARTA ON THE SUBJECT."

2. ON SEPTEMBER 2 IN PARLIAMENT WHITLAM STATED: "NO DEFINITE
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PROPOSALS WERE PUT TO THE MINISTER AND ME BY THE PORTUGUESE

ENVOY BECAUSE NO AGREEMENTS HAD BEEN MADE BETWEEN HIM AND THE
INDONESIAN AUTHORITIES AND NO DISCUSSIONS HAVE YET TAKEN
PLACE BETWEEN HIM AND ANY OF THE PARTIES IN TIMOR. WHEN
DISCUSSIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN TIMOR, WHEN ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN
MADE WITH TIMOR THAT WILL BE TIME ENOUGH FOR THE AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER ANY POSITIVE PROPOSAL." HE WENT ON TO
ASSERT THAT AUSTRALIA COULD NOT TAKE ON ANY RESPONSIBILITIES OF
A "COLONIAL CHARACTER" AND THAT ANY AUSTRALIAN ROLE WOULD BE
CONCENTRATED ON "ESSENTIALLY HUMANITARIAN AREAS".

3. COMMENT: IT HAS BEEN CLEAR THAT GOA HAS BEEN APPROACHING TIMOR
PROBLEM IN VERY GINGERLY FASHION AND DESPITE PRESSURES TO THE
CONTRARY (WHICH WE DOUBT ARE VERY STRONG) INTENDS TO AVOID ANY
COMMITMENT OF AUSTRALIAN RESOURCES TO RESOLUTION OF POLITICAL
SITUATION ON THE ISLAND BUT WILL EXTEND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
WITH RAAF IN TRANSPORT ROLE AND POSSIBLY MILITARY MEDICAL TEAMS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SELFDETERMINATION, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 SEP 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975CANBER05897
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750303-0828
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750985/aaaacxkg.tel
Line Count: 78
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 JUN 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <12 NOV 2003 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIME MINISTER ON PORTUGUESE TIMOR
TAGS: PFOR, US, AS, PT, (WHITLAM, E GOUGH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006